

WALDORF, MD – Today, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-5) attended the 30th Annual Black History Month Breakfast in Waldorf where he was joined by Senator Benjamin L. Cardin and keynote speaker, Ron Kirk, the United States Trade Representative serving in the Obama Administration, and hundreds of community leaders from Maryland’s Fifth District. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

“It’s my honor to welcome you all to our 30th annual Black History Breakfast. Black History Month originated 85 years ago—and that means that for more than a third of that time, we’ve been celebrating it with this breakfast, here in Maryland’s 5th District.

“Our Black History Breakfast started as a more informal event in the Cannon Caucus room near the Capitol. It was a chance for the 5th District community to come to Washington to share stories and talk about the most important issues of the year ahead. That was back in the early 80s—when all you had to do to get into the Capitol was to park your car on the street and walk through the door. The Capitol may have changed since then—and we may have moved this breakfast into the 5th District—but what hasn’t changed is the importance of this event to our community.

“For 30 years, we’ve come together to reflect on history—and to hear from some speakers who have made history themselves. We’ve heard from John Lewis and Kweisi Mfume, Donna Brazile and Valerie Jarrett. In 1995, we heard from a future Attorney General, Eric Holder. In 2006, we heard from a Senator named Barack Obama. And in 2008, we heard Tavis Smiley tell us that Barack Obama was going to win the White House—but that this was still going to be a divided country, and that there would be an enormous amount of work in front of us.

“For almost nine decades—and for three decades of this breakfast—why has marking Black History Month been so important? We do it, in large part, to correct the record: to counteract the untruth that black history has no place in American history.

“Dr. Carter G. Woodson said that he created this observance because, for too long, he had seen the centuries of African-American contributions ‘overlooked, ignored, and even suppressed by the writers of history textbooks and the teachers who use them.’ Black History Month was created as a way of overcoming that ignorance. But Black History Month isn’t only about history. Dr. Woodson believed that one of the great sources of racial injustice is ignorance

of the past—of ‘instruction to the effect that [black Americans] have never contributed anything to the progress of mankind.’ Black History Month is about recognizing the 400 years of African Americans whose lives helped to make our country what it is today, who made contributions in every sphere of our national life, from culture and business to politics and science.

“Black History Month is about progress: not just progress in how we understand our country’s story, not just understanding the progress that black Americans have helped create, but building progress for the future. We measure the march of America’s progress, from the slaves who fought for their freedom in the Civil War, to the civil rights movement that inspired the world, to the black leaders who are making history today. We measure the distance we have yet to go, before we can say that we have lived up to our nation’s founding promise of equal opportunity. We reflect not only on the achievements of the past—but on all that remains to be done in the present, whether it is ensuring all of our children an outstanding education, helping every American access a doctor’s care, or creating jobs in all of our communities, so that all of our families can have a chance to make it in America.

“And I believe, as Dr. Woodson believed, that we can build a better future by understanding the past—both our errors and our triumphs. I believe we can bring that better future closer when every American can say: black history is our history.”

Congressman Hoyer helped launch the annual breakfast when he became a Member of Congress in 1981, and attends every year to participate in a morning of fellowship and friendship with community leaders in recognition of Black History Month. Mr. Kirk participated in this year’s breakfast at the invitation of Congressman Hoyer.